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UNCLAS ROME 003484

SIPDIS

RULSJGA Commandant, US Coast Guard
RUCOCGA Commandant, Atlantic Area US Coast Guard
RUCPDC Commerce/NOAA/NMFS Enforcement, Sustainable Fisheries

DEPT FOR OES FOR ACTING DAS BALTON; OMC FOR TINKHAM, WARNER-
KRAMER, PLE

DEPT FOR EUR/WE

COMMERCE FOR NOAA/NMFS/IA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [PHSA](#) [ETRD](#) [IT](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: Progress Report on Ending the Italian Driftnet
Fishery

REFS: A) STATE 210780 B) 2002 ROME 5662

1. Summary: On 25 July 2003, Department and Embassy Rome officers met with Italian Department of Fisheries Deputy Director Plinio Conte to discuss Italy's implementation of the 1999 US-Italy driftnet agreement. It appears that Italy has made significant progress towards ending the use of large-scale, high seas driftnets. Embassy Rome will forward documents provided during the meeting to the Department. End summary.

2. On July 25, as requested by ref A, EST section arranged a meeting for OES/OMC officer Stetson Tinkham with appropriate Italian fisheries officials. Tinkham opened the meeting with a brief statement of USG concerns that a lack of reporting by Italy on how it was fulfilling the terms of our 1999 bilateral agreement might cause the driftnet issue to become an irritant in our bilateral relationship once again.

3. Italian officials (list in para 6 below) led by Fisheries Deputy Director Plinio Conte then described a series of steps that they had taken to bring driftnet fishing to an end. These include:

--Enacting new legislation that requires "compulsory dismissal or conversion" (boats could be scrapped or convert to another gear type) of the driftnet fishing licenses of the last 89 licensed actively fishing Italian driftnet vessels. The legislation entered into force on December 2002 and allocated a total of 5 million Euro (equally distributed between compensations to boat owners and to crew members), including funds provided by the Sicily and Calabria regional governments.

--Identifying crew members and vessel owners who would be compensated under the retirement scheme. They noted that each valid crew member (about 320) would receive 7,500 Euro in compensation, even if they convert to another type of fishing. Note: According to the law, the compensation for the owners, who decide to convert to another type of fishing, will vary from 9,861 to 60,333 Euro depending on vessel tonnage. If the owners decide to be compensated for scrapping these vessels, the compensation (which will also include EU funds) will be much higher, varying from 75,000 to 353,560 Euro for the same-size vessels. Italian officials told us that "many" owners would apply for the scrapping. End note.

--Canceling the driftnet portions of the fishing licenses of all of the 89 remaining vessels.

--Deleting the names of these vessels from the EU vessel registry, which contains a unique registry number for each vessel.

--Seizing and sealing the nets from all 89 vessels. According to the law, the driftnets can be "recycled or transformed" and the owners keep the profits of these operations.

--Receiving European Commission approval for their compensation plan in February 2003. Part of the Commission's review included a finding that the buyback funds were not a "market-distorting measure." Note: according to the text of the EU approval, the GOI compensation to convert is considered "reasonable", since the owners would receive only 15 pct and the crew only 50 pct of the EU compensation for definitive retirement (as mentioned above). End note.

--Seeking to initiate a uniform sanction scheme among all EU

member states in order to reduce disparities in the level of sanctions applied for fisheries violations. Fisheries International Affairs Giannella mentioned that the Council will establish a catalogue of sanctions to be applied by Member States for serious infringements. Comment: this is a complicated matter because the Justice system is within the competency of member states. End of comment. Giannella also mentioned the idea of establishing a EU Joint Inspection Structure at Community level, pooling national and EU monitoring and inspection resources for more effective implementation of control across the EU. Regarding enforcement, Giannella pointed out that non-EU (e.g. Malta and Cyprus) and North-African fishermen are still allowed to use driftnets. For this reason, the EU will try to transform its driftnet ban into a Mediterranean-wide ban, using the instrument of the General Fisheries Council for the Mediterranean (GFCM). According to Giannella, Italy insists on the need of a comprehensive approach by the EU of Med fisheries issues. For this reason, the GOI has organized the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Fisheries and Agriculture that will take place in Venice on November 25-27, 2003.

--Considering the use of marine reserves and marine sanctuaries to protect spawning and nursery areas for marine species.

14. Italian officials were not aware of recent NGO reports of driftnet fishing out of ports on the island of Ischia, but suggested that there will always be some who try to break the rules. They then provided copies of several documents that will be forwarded to the Department (OES/OMC). These include: the July 2002 law establishing the mandatory end of driftnet fishing; a summary of driftnet enforcement activities for 2002 (through October, the end of the fishing season); and related documents. Note: 2002 driftnet enforcement data were already known to us (ref. B). In summary, Port Authorities dedicated 15,101 hours and 93,614 nautical miles to driftnet monitoring in the 2002 season. During their monitoring activity, they caught and seized the nets of 9 illegal driftnet vessels in Palermo, 44 in Calabria, 19 in Catania, 12 in Bari, 2 in Naples, and 17 in Sardinia. End note.

15. GOI officials promised to provide information about seized or surrendered driftnets recycling and a summary of driftnet enforcement efforts for 2003 later in the year.

16. A list of participants in the meeting follows:

U.S. - Stetson Tinkham (OES/OMC); Federica Signoretti (Science Office, Embassy Rome).

Italy - Plinio Conte (Fisheries Deputy Director); Comm. Pietro Verna (head of National Center for Fishery Control and Operations); Pasquale Giannella (International Affairs director); Giovanni Granato (EU Funds Director); and Felice Mazzeo (Fishery Regulations Director).

17. This cable has been cleared by OES/OMS Stetson Tinkam.

Dwyer

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